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A VOICE FROM THE ROMAN CATHOLIC LAITY.

THE PAROCHIAL SCHOOL QUESTION.

AN OPEN LETTER

To Bishop Keane, Rector of the New Catholic University, at Washington, D.C.,

BY AN

IRISH CATHOLIC LAYMAN.

AN APPEAL TO ALL CLASSES, BUT ESPECIALLY TO OUR ROMAN CATHOLIC FELLOW-CITIZENS, TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE FOR THE PRESERVATION INTACT OF OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS AGAINST ALL FOREIGN INTERMEDDLING.

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TO THE PUBLIC.

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It has been clear from the hour when the question of Parochial versus Public Schools was forced upon the American people and the Roman Catholic Church by an Italian ecclesiastic and his counsellors, that a large minority, if not an actual majority, of our Catholic fellow-citizens were one with the American public in opposition to the whole scheme.

This pamphlet and "The Two Sides of the School Question" place within every one's reach the means of seeing the questions involved, as viewed by Americans, as voiced by the highest Roman Catholic ecclesiastics, and as looked upon by intelligent Catholic laymen whose success in life has grown so largely out of our beneficent system of Free Common Schools.

We ask editors, educators, legislators, and public-spirited citizens to aid us in scattering these pamphlets as a help to the formation of an intelligent and unembittered (because both sides have been as fairly as possible considered) public sentiment, where Catholics and Protestants shall unite as Americans to maintain and perpetuate for all generations our Public School System.

ARNOLD PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION.

Boston, Mass., 1890

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AN OPEN LETTER

ON THE

PAROCHIAL SCHOOL QUESTION.

BY AN IRISH-CATHOLIC LAYMAN.[1]

To the Right Rev. Bishop Keane, Rector of the Catholic University at Washington.

SIR, —As a Catholic American citizen, I have some criticism to offer to the public upon several points of the lecture which you recently delivered in various cities in New England on the school question, and later at Baltimore, and which it is presumably your intention to deliver at other places in the future.

THE CHURCH MUST PUT UP WITH FREE SPEECH.

It will no doubt strike you as very singular that a member of the Catholic laity should have any opinion to express on the question of education contrary to those formulated by his clerical superiors, and as more than singular that he should have the audacity to express it in public print. Such things, however, are possible, even in the most strictly governed churches. This is true, at least, in free-spoken America. Here the recent encyclical dictum, that "The actions of superiors ought not to be struck at by the sword of speech, even when they appear to merit a censure," will be apt to remind even

[1] The name of the author of this Open Letter is withheld for obvious reasons. He is well and widely known in his own special lines, is an honest, earnest Roman Catholic, and is vouched for by professional and public men, and business houses whose names would be recognized anywhere in the United States. — ED.

the Catholic reader, who gives it any thought, of its more venerable cousin-german, that other obsolete precept of clerical teaching, that a man should not aspire to rise out of "the condition in which God had placed him," which so long did service as a justification for the oppression of the masses and slavery. In this age every man that is a man tries to rise, — wants to improve his condition, — that venerable clerical doctrine to the contrary notwithstanding, just as a priest might strive to become a bishop and a bishop an archbishop, and so on upward to the papacy itself. Sons and daughters of Irish laborers, in America, struggle bravely upward into the professions, and America leads the world in freedom of speech. Free speech, sir, makes free men; free men will have free speech. Only the enslaved and the gagged are silent. The intelligence that would be free and grow has for its goal free speech, the guide of progress and censor of the world's wrong-doing. Perfect free speech will be the journeyman stage of civilization. The Church's dictum, "Censure not the actions of your superiors, even when they appear to merit censure," would land us back in the very first stage of modern civilization's apprenticeship, such as the Dark Ages knew. To-day the theory obtains that the wrong-doer is the more censurable for being a superior. Since mediæval times the light of intelligence has spread far and wide, illumining dark places, restraining and thwarting oppression, dethroning humbug and false pretence, pressing backward the wolves of humankind from their human prey, — and free speech has been its forerunner and herald. Mankind knows well its power for good, the oppressed and oppressor alike. Every friend of freedom is its champion, every enemy its adversary. The Russians strive for it; the Irish have suffered for it; Americans account it the very breath of their life. Submission and silence have ever been the desire of the tyrant, and of all who would make mankind the instrument of their own ends. The Czar applies the gag in Russia, but the Church cannot do it in America. "Actions, when they appear to merit a censure," will be censured, even those of ecclesiastical superiors, especially when,

as in this school question, which the ecclesiastics have forced upon us, the interests not only of the Irish race here, but of the whole American people, are involved and put in jeopardy.

The Question should be discussed on its Merits Alone.

This trouble about the schools has not been of the making of the Catholic laity; it has been thrust upon them by their ecclesiastical superiors. Yet, sharp though my words may sometimes be, what I have to say in censure of the parochial system I would say without respect or disrespect of persons. I would use the "sword of speech" upon the idea, not upon the man. The man in so weighty a discussion is of really very little account: the mechanism of the electric-light is of small consequence compared with the illumination which it gives. The illumination — the idea — is the main thing. It makes no difference in this discussion who you are or who I am, in our proper person, so long as our relationship to the subject is known. You are a bishop, I am a layman; you present the Catholic Church's Roman view, I the Catholic American citizen's. The idea is the meat of the egg, the disputant the shell, whose color (the breed of the bird being known) is given hardly a passing thought. But if the meat be "off color," that is of prime importance. (The American people, for example, consider your school scheme "off color," and refuse to swallow it.) In a word, in this discussion I would be as impersonal toward you, sir, and your fellow-promoters of the parochial scheme as I should be if I were engaged in debate with just so many phonographs into which you had spoken. I feel superior to any wish to offend any of you personally. I would pray the bishop for this occasion to lay aside his robes and mitre and step down in plain clothes (just as he was before he had ever worn any other) to the level of the mere layman, where we may talk pro and con with entire equality of station and freedom from restraint, as equal American citizens should. And if you will

not, I would ask you to look far and away behind me to that great "silent majority" of Catholic laity in whose interest I primarily speak, and to reflect for a moment, if, in a hemisphere where the best of Catholic emperors is dethroned and exiled in one and the same day to make way for government by the people, the enlightened Catholic laity of the United States may not be a quantity whose temporal interests are worthy of consideration in a matter which concerns them and theirs so deeply as does this momentous question of schools.

Let us mark this point well, sir: While the Catholic clergy in America might fare as well as ever they did, no matter how embittered this school agitation should grow to be, the laity could not fail to suffer great injury, in various ways, some of which they have experienced already, as you must know. I will go into this point quite fully as we proceed.

Authorship of the Lecture, and the Scheme proposed.

I believe I make no mistake in accepting the opinion, which your position and utterance warrant, that you are the appointed spokesman of the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, at Rome, on this question in the United States. You are a bishop of the Church, and rector of the Catholic University at Washington; and your lecture, I think it may fairly be assumed, has been dictated or revised, in substance, if not literally and in form, by those superiors at Rome who prepared the policy which you proclaim; that, in short, your utterance was the official message of the Catholic Church upon the school question to all the people and creeds in the United States.

I purpose in this letter to examine this school scheme, and its many present and probable effects upon Catholics and the country, in detail, conforming throughout to your declaration that in discussing this question we are not debarred from having "a clear and strong conviction concerning it." The

subject, sir, is too important for any intelligent, sincere man, especially if he be patriotic, not to feel strongly upon it.

Your proposition, as I interpret your very diplomatically phrased lecture, is this, that every denomination educate its own children in separate schools, at the expense of the State, "the churches to attend to the religious training of the children in the schools . . . *without any additional* expense;" the State "to have control so far as the secular education or all that concerns civil rights is concerned." This, of course, means the total extinction of the common schools, and the division of the school fund, or taxes raised for school purposes (if not also the then existing common school property) *pro rata* among the churches.

What Catholics suffer from Parochial Schools.

Let us now consider for a moment, the many temporal evils which are now, and promise to be in the future, only in greater degree, inflicted upon the Catholics of America by the establishment of parochial schools. (1) It taxes them doubly, and unnecessarily, for education; (2) it creates ill-will for them among their non-Catholic fellow-citizens, whom it causes to look upon them somewhat in the light of public enemies, yet with whom they would gladly live in peace and good-will; (3) it shuts Catholics out of public office to a very great extent, except in the few small spots, generally a ward or two of a city, where the voters of their own church are in the majority; (4) it tends to drive away Protestant patronage from the Catholic engaged in business or the professions; (5) it, quite naturally also, works against the advancement of the Catholic skilled or unskilled laborer, giving the Protestant employé the preference, the mass of employers being Protestants; (6) and, in general, it isolates the Catholics from the rest of the community, carrying forward the foreign nationality of the Catholic immigrant with its many attendant disadvantages, into the succeeding generations of his descendants, tending to fasten them for an indefinite

period in the grasp of the inferior position and regard in which he was held in the beginning. Thus, while Protestant immigrants, or, at the farthest, their American-born children, become known as Americans, possessing all the "coigns of vantage" in the body politic which that appellation carries with it, the American-born Catholics are in a fair — and "when fair most foul" — way of being through all their generations designated by the nationality of their immigrant ancestors — as "foreigners." We already see this thing in operation to a serious extent in Massachusetts; serious, not only as regards the Catholic citizens, toward whom it is unjust, but also for the continued peace and welfare of the State, since its tendency is to develop within the State a sort of *imperium in imperio* — a large semi-foreign body perpetuating its foreign ideas, and finally embittered against the State by the sense of deprivation of equality of rights at the hands of the majority, who monopolize the name of Americans; a condition of affairs which, when this subject element should themselves become the majority, could only result in counter persecutions, and perhaps civil war. Spread out thus, the situation is not a pretty picture for the patriot or the humanitarian to contemplate. The cause to-day is traceable to the ordinary sectarianism, greatly aggravated during the past few years by the presence of the parochial schools, which can grow only more obnoxious the more they increase in number, rendering the situation in each year more intolerable than in the year preceding. It has reached such a pass now that patriotic men, taking warning of the baneful effects — the mutually destructive effects, as regards the participants — of similar bigotries in older countries, as Ireland for instance, and in contemporary Canada, must wish to see this thing go no further, and the sores that have been opened enter upon their period of healing, and Massachusetts (and equally the country as a whole) resume her proper task of assimilating all her elements of population into one grand and harmonious nationality.

Thus, to return to the point of view of the Catholic lay-

man, the parochial school system exerts upon the Catholic American, at every stage of his existence, a damaging influence from which, while its cause lasts, he cannot possibly escape; presenting itself before him at every turn, as if he were haunted by the angry spirit of that American nationality into which he was adopted or was born, and which, by his apparent allegiance to an un-American system, he had seemed to scorn and discard. The country is interested to see whether the Catholic American will continue to allow himself to be fixed in this false position, or whether, reasonably mindful of himself and his posterity, and of the opinions of mankind, he will release himself from it in the simple way which lies open to him, and return to the only system of education that is in harmony with the genius of the civilization of his age and country, — that of the unsectarian common school, freed from sectarian topics and influences, as an ideal workshop might be where youthful apprentices were taught the useful trades, and relegating the religious education of the children to its proper precincts, those of the Church and the home.

Natural Effects of Separate Schools for Different Creeds, in Europe and America.

You say, very truly, that "this country is moulding together the most heterogeneous people the sun shines upon." Here, by implication, and, farther on in your lecture, by an indirect expression, you intimate that you would do nothing to "break up and destroy the homogeneity of the American people." But, sir, is not your church-school scheme the very thing, of all others, to bring about this destruction? I firmly believe it is. How can the blending of this republic's population into one people be promoted by the keeping separate the various elements which compose it? How advance union by secession? The parochial school movement is a secession from the public schools, which stand for union. The adoption of the complete scheme advocated in your lecture would

lead to still further disintegration. It would make every sect a secessionist. It would impede the assimilation of the American people as nothing else could do, while they remained under one flag. The principle of the scheme is akin to that of the old exploded states-rights idea — the claim of the right of each State to secede from the Union at will. This cannot well hope to flourish in a soil where that decayed. That was far, far stronger at the start than yours is now, or can ever hope to be. Millions of patriotic Americans had grown up inheriting the belief that the states-rights idea was native, indigenous, to the soil; not one American thinks that the parochial school is such. It is wholly foreign, in repute as well as in fact. As an agency obstructive to the amalgamation of the American people, the adoption of the scheme of a parochial school for every sect would be much more efficient than successful Southern secession, which would divide the population into only two parts, while the church-school system would separate it into many. The one would give us union "on the half-shell," the other would "smash it into smithereens." The establishment of the Confederacy would have sundered the country into two large islands; the church-school system would cut it up into a Polynesia, the brackish waters of sectarian hatreds lying between them, ever growing wider and bitterer, ever more impassable to the young or the old, till men would look on the political map of the world for the free America of to-day as vainly as for the lost Atlantis that lies buried in the ocean.

It is this tremendous power for mischief latent in the parochial school system, and already seen to be at work, which forms in the minds of Protestant Americans not only, but also of Catholics themselves, the first great objection to its existence. The Catholic schools are but a partial application of it, the scheme in its entirety taking in all of the denominations, if they would but have it. But this partial trial is enough (if any evidence had been needed) to show that the tendency of the parochial school in general is to arouse relig-

ious antipathies, set citizen against citizen, promote injustice, and eventually to endanger public order. As a first effect, those now in existence separate the school-children of the community into two classes, Catholic and non-Catholic, which in this case will mean anti-Catholic, engendering prejudices which tend to keep them, though citizens and mostly natives of a common country, separated through life. These prejudices give rise to opprobrious epithets, nicknames, and the like, always more or less active in thought, and only too frequently heard in acrimonious expression. I have had experience in this, having been in early youth a pupil at a school conducted by a Catholic Church in England. We Catholic children grew to cordially dislike the children who attended the Protestant schools, to the extent of seeking them out and throwing stones at them, particularly on the anniversary of the patron saint of Irish Catholics, and frequently upon other occasions; while the Protestant boys retaliated with stones and offensive epithets, principally the latter, which were used to make life miserable for us throughout the year. To the Protestant lads we were always "Paddies" and "Papists." We Catholics, on our side, believed them to be thoroughly bad, fit only to be drubbed in this life, and damned in the next, because they were not Catholics; *i.e.*, according to our text-books, believers in the only true religion. The Protestant boys, in their turn, in all probability, were equally certain that it was we Catholics who were heterodox, and deserving the fate here and hereafter which we had so freely yet conscientiously assigned to them. And, as "men are but children of a larger growth," we may be sure that, on both sides, with rare exceptions, these antipathies were carried with more or less virulence into maturer age. Now, in what way have those religious ill-feelings, — for they are all religious rather than racial, the Protestant Irish ranking with the English as brethren, — in what way, I ask, have the Catholic Irish in England gained by them? On the contrary, in what way have they not lost by these prejudices? Being the weaker element, both in wealth and numbers, in

the community, have not the Irish Catholics in Great Britain had to take an inferior position, and stay in that inferior position, or emigrate, largely on account of the prejudices fostered by the prevailing system of separate schools for the various creeds, such as you advocate for America? Has it not been a principal means of keeping many of them out of the higher employments, both public and private, while Irishmen who were not Catholics were helped by it? But how could the effects of that prejudice-fostering, bigotry-breeding school system be different? Is not such a state of things only the natural, inevitable result of Catholic isolation in any country where Catholics are in the minority? Look at the Protestant provinces of Canada, where like results exist from like causes. And in the Catholic provinces of that country are not the Protestant minority sufferers from similar prejudices also? How much, pray, is morality or the good of the country promoted in either instance? In what way has it added to the reputation of Canada abroad, or the happiness of her people at home? Catholic bigotry is no more promotive of good things than is the Protestant article. But our point is, that the isolation of any one class in a community must lead inevitably to estrangement from all other classes; and this is the cataract toward which Catholics in America are drifting in consequence of the demand of their clergy for separate schools. In England the estrangement of the creeds, especially as relates to Catholics, is bad enough, Heaven knows; but there the idea of the free (*i.e.*, fee-less) common school is even yet untried, and attendance at separate schools has been for centuries, and is now to a considerable extent, a matter of greater convenience or of necessity, while in America the contrary has been the case, and hence the conditions in this country are conducive to an estrangement deeper, wider, more bitter, more irreconcilable, since here the isolation of the Catholics is seen — yes, proclaimed even, by their clerical rulers — to be an entirely voluntary act, and is also one which is interpreted by the rest of the community as being inimical to the common welfare.

Right reverend sir, one might think that the Catholics of America, coming here so poorly equipped in wealth and education, and with many ancient prejudices to face, had enough adverse circumstances to contend against already, without their clergy going to the trouble of digging a moat, deep, wide, and impassable, between them and all the other elements of this country's population, and erecting within the enclosure the red flag of creed distinction, so hateful to Americans and the spirit of American institutions. The avowed object of this isolation is "the saving of Catholic souls"; but I doubt very much, sir, if the next generation of Catholics will thank the clergy for "saving" them so effectually, and they may feel, rather, that what they most need is to be saved from the antiquated arrogance and intermeddling of the clergy. The next generation, I incline to think, will prefer to be allowed to be more American, even at the risk of being a little less devout. Rather than be herded together as "foreigners," they will be willing to confide their hopes of salvation to the means afforded by the church services, the home, and the Sunday-school, as their fathers have had to do until within a year or two, with very good results so far as heard from. I know that a very large proportion of the present generation tolerate your labors in the parochial-school direction with decided dissatisfaction.

Parochial Schools not started by the Laity.

Throughout your lecture, sir, you talk as if the parochial schools had been established at the wish of the laity, but I will here state the actual facts on that point in language as plain as it is possible for me to make it.

The parochial school movement did not originate with the Catholic laity; they were not consulted at its inception; they have not since been afforded an opportunity to say whether they approved of it or not. From the beginning until to-day the Catholic laity of America have been treated in this important matter on the explicit understanding, on the part of

the clergy, that it is a thing about which they are not entitled to have an opinion, except such as are dealt out ready-made to them by the clergy, who claim to be the only competent or rightful judges regarding the education of the laity — a not unusual claim with the priesthoods of religions even prior to the advent of Christianity, and based, no doubt, on similar good motives. In short, the laity have been treated all along as they were during those dark ages when education was confined to the clergy — as a pack of ignoramuses; as if no Catholic yet knew anything, except the comparatively small number of individuals educated for the Church! And where a few among the Catholic laymen have ventured to openly entertain any contrary opinion, its expression has been greeted by the clergy with indignant censure or pitying scorn. (I know this, for I have experienced it.) Quite a different state of things from the one pictured forth in your statement that "in proof of *their convictions* they [the laity] support schools at their private expense." You must, sir, have meant to have said "the Pope's" or "the clergy's" convictions. And as to the laity being at the expense of supporting these schools, what intelligent layman would say it was a thing that in more than ten cases in a hundred is wholly voluntary? Is it not, instead, the simple fact that, as a rule, the priest goes ahead and erects the school building, after (perhaps) announcing to the congregation his intention, without taking any sort of vote or expression as to whether they favor the project or not, proceeding on credit or the temporary use of other of the Church funds (of all of which he is sole collector and custodian), and finally, collecting the cost from his parishioners by begging or bull-dozing? And to speak the truth for the priest, this is in every instance, perhaps, the only way of proceeding left open to him, since the highest Church authorities have commanded him to establish such a school in his parish, and his people are not over and above wishful to go to the expense, which is large and quite unnecessary, the State having already provided excellent schools and teachers and school-books free of charge. The poor

man's lot, especially if he be friendly to the public schools, is not an enviable one; he knows, like the gentleman in the verse, that, between the Pope and public opinion, he will be "damned if he does, and damned if he don't." But the Pope, his supreme ruler, is the stronger influence, and he goes on with the erection of the school. In due time he tells the people what nice, pious teachers he has secured for the children (Catholic sisters or brothers of some religious order), and that their coming is a great favor to this particular parish — few parishes could hope to be so exceptionally favored. And the reputation for piety and devotedness of the teachers helps soften the congregation toward the new school, although the hard-headed ones still insist that the school was not needed, and grumble at the life-long burden of supporting it.

There are many priests, of course, who go into this matter with the zeal and arrogance of fanatics, employing as aids all the influences available to their position to make their parishioners co-operative and obedient; but the processes of raising the money needed, and the monopoly of initiative and management by the priest, are in all cases the same. Except as objects of taxation and instruction the laity are of no account.

The laity in the long run pay all the bills; but there their participation in the planning and erection and management of the parochial school begins and ends. The priest orders in the music and does the dancing, so to speak, and the laymen look on and pay the piper. Then, taking the lecture which we have under consideration as an illustration, the good Bishop comes to town and declares to the known world in general, and to the parish itself in particular, that the laymen liked the dancing very much, believing it to be a healthful exercise from which they would derive a great deal of benefit, and "*in proof of their convictions*" they supported a whole colony of pipers at private expense!

But the worthy Bishop, let us say, sir, was mistaken. The laymen still declare they had nothing to do with the entertainment, beyond watching the sport and paying the bills.

And, moreover, it appears to be the fact that the music was selected at the command of a number of gentlemen residing in Italy, mostly natives thereof, and was operated not so much by a bellows as by a crank, so that persons on the outside knew it was Italian the moment they heard it. It was not Irish music, nor German, nor French. And a New York gentleman who has exceptional means of knowing, informs me that even the Italian laymen in this country, themselves, do not all prefer these costly school airs imported from the Tiber, when the superior American article can be had right at hand for the asking.

Why Some Catholic Parents send, and Some do not send, their Children to Parochial Schools.

Let us pass on to the membership of the parochial schools. Some Catholic parents send their children to them, but why? For various reasons. The more devout, because they were told by the priests that these schools were necessary for making "good Catholics" of their children (as if the church, and the Sunday-school, and the confessional, and the many church societies, and the numerous holy-day services, and the Catholic home influences — not to mention the blessings of the Pope and the prayers of the clergy — were not enough, or had been tried in this country and found wanting: a confession which, if persisted in, might seem to say that the more free and intelligent Catholics became, the more the Church felt the need of looking after her fences — an implication which, of course, every good Catholic is expected to utterly deny). Then, again, other parents send their children to these schools because the priests, or their semi-clerical representatives (Christian brothers and nuns), insisted that as "good Catholics" it was their duty to send them; still others, because the location was convenient; quite a large number, because the parents concluded to "grin and bear it" rather than enter upon bad terms with their pastors; others, because the priests told them they must send them, or by their

failure become guilty of "a sin against God"; and yet others, because the priests threatened to deprive them of the Church sacraments until they did — a menace calculated to harass the more timorous souls with visions of possible eternal perdition, and all classes of Catholics in greater or less degree with the losses and annoyances attendant upon religious ostracism.

On the other hand, many Catholic parents have openly resisted the expressed wishes of the clegy and teachers in this matter; one, among the number of which I have personal knowledge, being the father of a family of youths, of both sexes, and whose eldest son had lately been ordained for the priesthood. That American-born young priest, who had received his earlier education in the public schools, took the side of his father against the pastor, believing the public schools to be good enough for his younger brothers and sisters (better, indeed, for the purposes of education, he said, than the parochial school); and in his argument, he might have stated, as he probably did, that the public schools had afforded an excellent education to many other Catholic boys and girls, both American and Irish-born, who had since become Catholic sisters or clergymen, including many priests, not a few bishops, and at least one archbishop, the brilliancy of whose learning is only paralleled by the devoutness of his piety; not to speak of the thousands of Catholic girls who had graduated from being pupils of public schools into becoming their teachers, and reflect credit alike on the race that produced them, the Church to which they belong, and the country which afforded to them and their Irish-Catholic parents the splendid opportunities which culminated in their education. In addition to these, the arch of triumph is further extended and emblazoned by the long line of Irish-born boys, and American boys of Irish descent, the sons of poor immigrants, resplendent and numerous as "an army with banners," who have passed from the so-called "godless" public schools out into the paths of commerce, and the learned professions, and the halls of highest legislation, contributing

by their character and talents and success to lift up the credit of their race, not only in this country, but, by the medium of reputation, throughout the realms of civilization, and proving to the acceptance of a hitherto doubting world the claim of their fatherland to the right of self-government. Without the beneficent aid of the free "godless" public schools of America, how many to-day (how few, rather!) would be the lawyers, doctors, business men, and school teachers — yea, and priests — of the Irish-Catholic element in America, who to-day are numbered by thousands? Without the Irish-Catholic fruits of the "godless" public schools of America, and their brains and money and influence, where to-day would be cause of home-rule in Ireland? — back where it was in the days of the law-made famine, — poor, prostrate, and despised, — before the Irish crossed the ocean in great numbers to avail themselves of America's hospitality and the boundless blessings of America's "godless" public schools. Shall we not, sir, "judge the tree by its fruit"? Yet all these things were done — all these laurels were won — prior to the coming of the parochial school scheme from Italy to check the material progress of our people, and inject into the politics of this nation the wretched old-world bitterness of sectarian animosities. Why then, sir, was not this splendid "well enough" let alone? Wherein could the Church suffer from it? Wherein, will you confess, *did* she suffer from it? In what respect has it harmed the Catholics of America, or the American population as a whole? You teach us that the Church expounds only the truth, and when has truth suffered from the enlightenment of her worshippers?

Are Catholics coerced in this Matter?

A great deal has been said lately, sir, by yourself and other officers of the Church, about the sacredness of the right of the parent to select the school which his child shall attend, the object of the argument being to hold up the State in the character of a tyrant for having undertaken the management

of the schools. But, sir, the State in America is only a great association of the people for self-government, where all are equal members, and in which nothing is done except by vote and in accordance with the will of the majority of the taxpayers. Can you say as much for the management of the parochial schools? Is it not the fact, on the contrary, that the Catholic parent, though he pays the taxes for the erection and support of the parochial schools, is not allowed to have a voice in their origin or management, the whole matter being dictated to him by a small assemblage of foreign gentlemen residing in Italy, perhaps not one of whom ever set foot in this country? Which, then, in the name of common decency, is the tyrant? The Church, which allows no lay voice to be heard and rules from abroad, or the State which is the expressed will of all the people of this country, both lay and clerical? And, let me ask, sir, do you think that those gentlemen gain anything in dignity or reputation, for either themselves or their Church, who stand forth and try to persuade an intelligent people to believe the very opposite of facts so self-evident? In preceding pages I have given a pretty complete exposition of the facts in the case, and yet I find your lecture — presumably the authorized official utterance on the subject — authorized by those very same foreign gentlemen, our Italian dictators, saying as regards the Catholics sending their children to the parochial schools, that in doing so they "exercise full freedom of conscience," and that "they have not their conscience made for them, as many suppose." Why, sir, observation and inquiry fully warrant me in saying, that as regards Massachusetts, not more than one case in twenty of Catholic parents taking their children from the public schools and sending them to the parochial has been wholly voluntary, and that if a secret ballot of the laity had been taken on the question at the outset, not one parochial school now in this State would ever have been established. I believe, furthermore, that if such a ballot were taken to-day, and the option left to the laity, free from coercion, there is hardly one parish in Massachu-

setts that would not vote them out of existence. The majority of the Catholic people of America have never wanted these schools and do not want them to-day.

Again, farther along in your lecture you say: "It is charged that the Catholic Church is tyrannizing over her people in this matter of education. This is a serious charge, and devoid of truth." I am a little shocked at your saying this, sir, as any poor layman might be, who knew that before you said it you had commended a Catholic book published by a Catholic firm in Baltimore, "whose pages," as its Catholic author says in his preface, "contain the conciliar or single rulings of no less than 380 [three hundred and eighty] of the high and highest Church dignitaries" on the duty of Catholic parents to send their children to the parochial schools, under penalty of committing sin, or being refused admission to the sacraments. That book, which you, sir, and several other bishops commended (Monsignor Preston writing of it "a compilation of unquestionable authorities") contains a whole cargo of evidence that "the Catholic Church is tyrannizing over the consciences of her people in this matter of education" — and you seem to have forgotten it! But perhaps you would now argue that as the Church has made it a law that her children shall be educated in parochial schools, her compelling obedience to this law cannot be tyranny, since her power to make such laws is derived from God, whose infallible representative she is upon earth — and that therefore your denial was theoretically correct. But this was not what you meant in your lecture, in which you tried to make the American public believe that the Catholic laity "exercise full freedom" of choice in the matter of sending their children to the parochial schools. And, sir, in passing I would take leave to inform you that the Catholic portion of one of your audiences were painfully surprised at the rashness of your statement. In your lecture you were speaking, not of theory, but of substantial facts, which, notwithstanding your stunning denial, are none the less felt to be tyranny by those who suffer from them, and by many

other good people in this country whom they do not directly affect. England passes laws for the "good government" of the Irish, and compels obedience to them at the point of the bayonet, then characterizes the charge that she is "tyrannizing over" the Irish as "devoid of truth," or words of like effect. She is only governing them "for their good," you know, and (if we would believe her) is governing them better than they could govern themselves, or than anybody else could govern them — just for all the world what the Church claims in this matter of schools! It seems to be a way that governments have (whether clerical or secular) when dealing with peoples to whom they acknowledge no indebtedness for their right to govern them. England, as you may have heard, sir, also repudiates the milder term "coercion." England, one might think, is enabled to make such claim in conformity with theoretical truth on the same grounds that the Catholic Church probably stands upon in this school question. The crown of England rules Ireland by "divine right," as the Church does Catholics, and England and the Church have each many written statutes, but also an unwritten constitution, which is in each case very elastic, and unequalled in handiness for the purposes of whatever those who execute it may believe (or pretend to believe) to be good government.

But as to the coercion employed to secure pupils for the parochial schools, I have known of it for a long time. So have, with like feelings of revulsion, many other Catholic laymen. I could cite numerous instances of it, all concealed from the public gaze. But it is not necessary to have seen these; it is the inevitable inference from the well-known factors of the case. These are, (1) that the Church authorities have decreed the establishment of parochial schools; (2) they have declared the public schools to be "unchristian" and "godless"; — does all this imply any choice left to the members of this Church as to which school their children shall attend, once the parochial school is opened? Not in the slightest. There is no room for it. The idea of allowing such a free choice to the laity was never for a moment

thought of. It is not the Church's way of doing business. The clergyman who should so far have forgotten the polity of his church as to suggest it in the Baltimore council, would have been immediately unfrocked as a dangerous innovator, if not excommunicated for a heretic. What intelligent man does not know this? And yet, sir, here is the assurance officially given to the American public that the Catholic laity are allowed to "exercise full freedom" in this matter, and that as to coercion, the Church never thought of such a thing! If this were intended for strategy, it has failed already of its purpose. It has not disarmed, nor even diminished, non-Catholic criticism of the parochial schools.

In addition to the foregoing simple deductions and the "compilation of unquestionable authorities,"—three hundred and eighty in number,—actions continue to speak louder than words. The recent action of a priest at Newark, N.J., threatening his parishioners with refusal of the sacraments unless they sent their children to the parochial school, and similar instances that have got into the newspapers elsewhere during the past few years, are popularly taken as truer criterions of the situation than official professions of non-interference. No one has yet heard that these priests have been reprimanded, or their actions repudiated, by their superiors. These facts confirm in the public mind the inference that the authority in question was a part of the system which it was in these instances employed to enforce. That all parish priests have not exercised this authority to its fullest extent is evidence that the clergy are permitted to vary the method and amount of its application according to the requirements of the circumstances in which they find themselves placed. They may "put on the screws" as hard as they think their people will stand it. (Therefore, to apply the logic of the priests' own conduct in this matter, if the people did not stand it at all, the "screws" would not be put on at all, and there would be no parochial schools. There is a hint here for the people's future attitude on this question.) But, as Bishop McQuaid of Rochester plainly says, "It is not left

with bishops to choose in this matter. They receive commands from a higher authority than their own." And if Bishop Keane may not choose, how can he assert that the laity may, and that it is not meant that there should be any coercion? The priests, too, of course, must obey this "authority which is higher than" the bishops'. So that it is plain that, though the coercion may in spots be applied gradually and in piecemeal, it is only a question of time until it is applied in every parish to its fullest extent, until all the Catholic children in America are herded by themselves in parochial schools, or Catholic parents who refuse to be coerced in this matter are subjected to religious ostracism and priestly persecution for daring to stand up for that right of parents to decide as to which school their children shall attend, which the Church (in its attacks upon the State schools) so frequently declares to be "sacred," but is all the time determined Catholic parents shall not exercise.

If the Catholics of America would not humbly submit to live under this clerical coercion, but would, on the contrary, show themselves fit to be free citizens of a free country, they should adopt the definition of their right as thus proclaimed by the Church authorities from cardinals down, and resolve to be as determined in maintaining that right as the inventors of this parochial-school scheme at Rome are in trampling upon it. The maxim that "those who would be free, themselves must strike the blow," was never truer than it is in this case; for no one can help the Catholic laity settle the school question more effectually, or with so little trouble, as they can themselves. All they have to do is to send their children to the public schools. The parochial-school buildings, where they already exist, would do excellently as places to hold Sunday-schools in and meetings of the societies connected with the church, also meetings of the Catholic organizations in the parish in general, whose members now, beside being taxed by the clergy individually to support the parochial school, have collectively to pay rent for halls at perhaps less convenient distances from their homes.

The Prevailing Protestant Distrust.

Protestants, as you, sir, must well know, have, both in England and America, as a body, long had a lurking distrust of all large movements of a public or semi-public character instituted by the Catholics, more especially if, as in this case, the movement originates with, and is conducted by, the clergy. It were, perhaps, profitless to discuss how well or ill founded this distrust may be, or why it exists here; we know for a certainity that it does exist here. We may feel a reasonable assurance, too, that no lecture delivered by an officer of the Church, no matter how high or able he may be, or how diplomatically it may be worded, will have the least perceptible effect toward its removal. Your lecture, sir, merits eminent rank in all of these qualities, yet the distrust of which I speak exists in New England as strongly today as it did the day before you started on your recent tour in this section. It is no less fixed than it is uncompromising. Much of it, no doubt, is an importation from Great Britain and Ireland, where the system of separate schools for the various creeds helped to create and foster it; while a large part of it may fairly be ascribed to the dislike which Americans entertain on general principles for any sort of foreign allegiance, such as Catholics are popularly supposed to acknowledge to the Pope of Rome. Do you think that this distrust is going to be removed or diminished by the Catholic clerical movement for the overthrow of the common schools and the substitution of church schools? Must not this movement rather arouse and intensify this distrust? Has it not already done so, to the extent of making this question, when Catholics are up for office, the dominating issue in Massachusetts municipal elections, to the serious detriment of Catholic citizens? And, as matters had assumed this aggravated form previous to the delivery of your lecture, when the parochial-school movement had gone no farther than the withdrawal of a small proportion of the Catholic pupils from the public schools, is this distrust not likely to

increase in intensity since your lecture was delivered, which, by broad implication at least, showed that the Catholic scheme in its entirety included the extinction of the common schools and a division of the school fund for the support of schools conducted by the churches; the latter a proposition which, though hitherto unexpressed, but not unexpected, has long been notoriously obnoxious to non-Catholics in America in general? Surely, sir, the way to diminish a popular distrust is not by enlarging its cause.

But, sir, it may be that the clerical promoters of the church-school scheme do not care for this non-Catholic distrust, and are prepared to openly set it at defiance, or at least to go on with their programme regardless of it. This would be a serious phase of the question, indeed. As if, for instance, the promoters had reasoned somewhat in this fashion: "We want this thing done. We must expect, of course, that it will arouse antagonism among non-Catholics, loud, bitter, and universal; and in all probability, it will prove unwelcome even to our own laity. But the laity must at least begin by tolerating the new system, and finally, when they find they have got to take it, and to pay for it, conclude to make use of it, and say nothing about it, unless to swear that they like it. From our intrenched position behind these we need have no fear of the non-Catholics. We shall not only be safe, but the situation of necessity fixing the laity in an exposed position, where they will be compelled to take all the brunt of the assaults, through the medium of their temporal interests, the happy effect must be the gradual conversion of the laity into vengeful enemies of our assailants, thus in the end, by the pure force of circumstances, placing ready to our hand a willing host to lead forward to the realization of our hopes. Not because they have grown to love our scheme more, but their assailants less. But the end is the same. Let us begin the good work at once." If, sir, this were the reasoning used at the birth of this project, the promoters deserve to be complimented, I regret to observe, inasmuch as the movement since has well corresponded with its conclusions. For a

parallel case, I can think only of the plan considered by the late Confederacy of sending black regiments to the front to do battle against their would-be emancipators and in support of their own enslavement. If other reasoning were employed, it does not appear on the face of the facts. So I must conclude that the supposition above stated is substantially correct. If so, then it is high time for the Catholic laity of this country to take counsel of their interests, which are so deeply involved in this question, and which this question puts so much in jeopardy. It is partly with this belief, and for the purpose of arousing Catholic thought on this serious subject, that I write this letter. For justice's sake also, I want to make known to the country at large the position, very different from the popularly imagined one, which the Catholic laity really occupy in this matter, the Irish Catholics at least. I believe the more intelligent portion of the French Canadians here take a similar attitude. We Irish Catholics are in this country to stay. We desire to make it our country in the fullest and most proper sense, as the best native Protestant might. We are loyal citizens, and want to reap all the benefits of the fact of our loyalty and our common American citizenship. But we cannot reap these benefits, to which we are lawfully entitled, if a movement be set on foot in our name which is hateful to five-sixths of our fellow-citizens. The Catholics of all nationalities in this country are at most ten millions in a population of sixty-five millions.[1]

But for this parochial-school movement the Protestant distrust of Catholics would have remained dormant, if not have

[1] Perhaps our Roman Catholic friends will better understand our distrust on a large scale, when it is remembered, laying aside all history except what is known to the present generation, that in an allocution of July 22, 1855, Pius IX. declared to be absolutely null and void the acts of the government of Piedmont, which he held to be prejudicial to the rights of the Church. In the same year he did the like with the laws of Sardinia and Spain; in 1856, with Mexico; in 1862, with Austria; and in 1863, New Granada; and in every case the laws which he pronounced null are integral parts of the Constitution of the United States and of our common law. What can we think when the right to do this is seriously re-affirmed at Baltimore, in November, 1890, in the resolutions of the late Catholic Congress? — Ed.

gradually died away, as it had been doing, and as all sensible and patriotic citizens, Protestants as well as Catholics, would wish that it might continue to do; whereas now, in consequence of this movement, that distrust is fast coming to be more widespread, and also more bitter, than in the worst days of the Knownothing agitation, so much condemned by public men and editors, and by none so much as by the Catholics themselves, who had been the sufferers from it, *and who must be the sufferers from it at any time that it may exist.* Chief among these stalwart denouncers of Knownothingism, past and present, are those selfsame Catholic newspapers that now lend themselves so subserviently to the denunciation of the public schools, and are thus furnishing grounds for the revival of those very antipathies which they at the same time so loudly condemn. It were devoutly to be wished that these Catholic press-writers might acquire a little of the modern, manly, American spirit of their late contemporary, Dr. Brownson — and come out into the bright sunlight of the close of the nineteenth century, not go groping back among the refuse ideas of the eighteenth, and of which the printing-press which they misuse is the natural enemy — instead of yielding their pens so readily upon a question which does not belong to an international system of religion, but to the worldly, bread-and-butter affairs of each country.

The Catholics of America, I am well assured, do not want their religion either pushed or dragged into politics; and they have a very decided aversion to seeing the Church authorities, whether priest or Pope, saying or doing anything to contribute to an end so distasteful to them. Nothing would please them better than to see the Pope and the priests leave politics alone, and stick to their religion, leaving politics entirely to the laymen. The clergy, as they commonly say, "never meddle with politics but they put their foot in it." Such meddling lessens the spiritual influence and dignity of the clergy — a fact which the laity generally recognize, and as generally deplore. The clergy never meddle in politics, moreover, but they put a handicap upon the laity in the race

for power and riches, tending to keep them forever in the lowest places. This handicap is now become so heavy (and promises to be heavier) as to be unbearable. Hence arises the remark so common among the more thoughtful of them, "no wonder the Irish are poor!" All are agreed that religion is not improved by linking it with politics. I should hope that I am doing a kindness to the Church authorities in giving this feeling such a frank expression, as well as helping to abate somewhat (as I also hope) the Protestant distrust in so far as it relates to the laity.

The Reason Rome gives for the Change.

You say, sir, this country "has wonderfully developed the intellectual side of education, but the moral side is the more important, because it is much more important what a man's character is than what he knows." And you make this opinion the principal argument which you offer for a change of schools. But at what point in the intellectual development would you draw the line of restriction? And, applied to children, how would you, or how could you, keep it from advancing beyond that point after the children had passed out of your school? By destroying all literature except your text-books? By shutting the graduated pupil in an iron safe of which you alone hold the key? The first of these methods might have stood a better chance of success in those "dark ages" antedating the printing-press, when so large a part of the literature extant was confined to manuscripts in the possession of the clergy. In our day, we know it is generally accepted that crime is the offspring or foster-child of ignorance, while good morals increase with the education of the intellect. And this belief is in this country so deeply rooted, that, while the spectacle of an eminent teacher of morals deprecating our "wonderful development of the intellectual side of education" as prejudicial to moral development may excite surprise, I do not think it capable of convincing any great number of this intelligent people that a change to a

school system intended to restrict intellectual development, is at any time desirable. No large portion of the American people, it seems to me, will ever rebel against the public schools on the ground that their children are being taught too much in the knowledge of the subjects necessary to success in secular affairs, and not enough prayers, or complain that such teaching is obstructive of their proper training in morals. It is at least certain that, among a people so intelligent, should such change of opinion ever occur, it will not be without the presentation of a great deal better evidence than a Platonic *ipse dixit* — the mere say-so of any man or set of men, however eminent or personally worthy of respect. "The truth before Plato," is a maxim as popular in America as with Aristotle.

Your theory and plan are not native to America, and have little prospect of ever becoming naturalized. And, sir, let me here tell you that it is a question which sticks hard in the minds of most men as to whether the reason publicly assigned by the Church for the proposed change is the true one. Many men consider this reason insufficient and invalid. One higher in the Church recently said: "The little child that is familiar with the Christian catechism, has mastered the great problem of life." The catechism is a subject for the Sunday-school. If a church cannot teach this sufficiently well without going into the secular schools to do it, the fault would seem to be with that church, rather than with the schools where it was not taught. The churches ought to be able to teach religion without intruding into the secular schools, and breaking in upon the study of the three R's. When they claim that they cannot, they belittle their usefulness; and as churchmen were never prone to confess inefficiency, the claim that they need the schools in which to prosecute their work only suggests an ulterior object which they are anxious to keep concealed. A Buddhist or a Mohammedan might conclude that the real purpose of the ecclesiastics was to secure the greatest possible control over the minds of the laity, with the view to eventually dominating Christen-

dom, or, as a Yankee would say it, that the Pope and the clergy wanted to "run the earth" again as they did in the Middle Ages.

All American Priests not Opponents of the Public Schools.

There are quite a number of Catholic priests in this country, as we know, who are not unfriendly to the public schools, and who so little approve of parochial schools as to receive the command for their erection with anything but satisfaction. They believe their people are taxed enough already. This progressive minority (perhaps, for all a layman can know, it might be shown they were really in the majority, if a secret ballot were taken) share in the laymen's view that these schools are mischievous and unnecessary. I have known one priest to speak of them (privately, of course) as "un-American." *Their* opinion was not consulted in preparing this scheme, we may be sure, no more than that of the laity; and they are treated with like indifference in regard to their approval now. The idea was started, and the scheme matured, above and beyond these gentlemen. And more is the pity that their views on this question could not have been heard and have prevailed. The result would have been far more satisfactory to the Catholics of the United States, whose temporal interests would have been saved from the burden of a powerful public opprobrium, now, perhaps, long to be borne, without at the same time impeding their spiritual training. Still, the situation is not hopeless, if the Catholic laity, together with the more American-minded of the clergy, would but display the courage of their convictions and the sound common sense of their cause. Then, sir, this intelligent generation might hope to see, by the simplest possible means available to any reform, that of quiet neglect, that mischief-making anachronism, the church-managed school, speedily relegated to the obscurity which its unsuitableness to this age and country deserves, and which the interests of an

enlightened and progressive civilization demand. The effect would be an immediate rise of Catholic Americans in the respect of their fellow-citizens, with its many attendant advantages, instead of that decline in esteem which will follow want of a timely assertion of independence in the matter of education. And this independence, you, sir, admit they are entitled to, when in your lecture you say, "Every Catholic knows that the Church has no authority to decree anything contrary to his conscience."

O'Connell's Declaration about Politics and Rome.

The Irish Catholics of America have not forgotten O'Connell's declaration, made half a century ago, that Irishmen would not take their politics from Rome. O'Connell at that time was the approved champion ("the white-haired boy") of the Church, being the author of "Catholic Emancipation." Beginning at Rome, the school question has to-day been interjected into the politics of the United States, to the great detriment of people of the same race and religion as O'Connell. The time, therefore, would seem to be ripe for another Catholic emancipation to take place in this country, not this time from obnoxious English laws, but Roman. The re-statement of O'Connell's dictum is the necessary first step toward this end. And we may be sure that the Irishmen of America to-day are not going to be less courageous than O'Connell and his contemporaries were in Ireland fifty years ago in the asserting of their rights, nor less resolute in maintaining them.

Shall the State apply the Remedy?

Then, too, sir, there is the State's interest in this matter. The State witnessing, as time rolls on, the widening of the estrangement between the two great classes of her citizens, such as I have sketched, cannot but take cognizance of its cause, and decide upon a remedy. And if that time shall

come, what, think you, will that remedy be? To my mind, there is none possible but the adoption of legislation, either by constitutional amendment or by statute, extending the principle of compulsory education so as to require that every child of school age residing within the State shall attend the common schools established by the State, and none other, unless for sound exceptional reasons clearly defined by law.

Since the State can say *when* a child shall attend school, why could it not also say *where?* In doing the latter, it would only be following the example which the Church is trying so hard to set.

Such a step by the State, as things look to-day, cannot be long postponed. It would be gladly welcomed by many Catholics as affording relief from a situation which they have never liked, and which grows every day more distasteful. Things in this country move quickly. The secret ballot would leave the parochial scheme in a very small minority.

God Bless our Public Schools.

And now, right reverend sir, for a parting word and a sentiment (not saying that I may not address you again should occasion call for it). If there were nothing more to the credit of our public schools than the inestimable benefits which they have conferred upon the Catholics of America, — which, while great boons in themselves, constitute but a very small portion of the good that these schools have done for this nation and mankind, — the American Catholic might well say: "If this Catholic product alone comprised the whole fruitage of the public schools of America, let the public schools of America go on, and God bless them! And God bless America for establishing and maintaining them, and make her ever watchful and wise and strong in their defence!"

"EVERYBODY OUGHT TO READ IT."—VOX POPULI.

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